

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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EB-07 H-02 INR-07 IO-13 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 SP-02

OC-06 PRS-01 SS-15 USIE-00 USSS-00 SY-05 WRD-01

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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6394

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

FAA WASHDC

DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 11411

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, EG

SUBJECT: EGYPT AIR HIJACKING

REF: (A) CAIRO 11367 (B) CAIRO 11381

1. EXXON CAIRO EMPLOYEE DON MURRAY AND MRS. MURRAY RETURNED FROM LUXOR EVENING AUGUST 24, AND POLCOUNS DEBRIEFED THEM THIS MORNING. MURRAY SAID HE THOUGHT FOUR OTHER AMERICANS WERE ON HIJACKED PLANE: MR. AND MRS. GREENE FROM CALIFORNIA AND A COUPLE FROM NEW YORK, ALL OF WHOM ARE STILL IN LUXOR/ ASWAN. HE THOUGHT THERE MIGHT ALSO HAVE BEEN ANOTHER AMERICAN COUPLE FROM UNESCO (LOCAL UNESCO OFFICE UNAWARE OF ANY UNESCO PERSONS ON BOARD). GREENES REGISTERED AT HILTON MENTIONED REF A WERE NOT COUPLE ON AIRCRAFT. MURRAY'S ACCOUNT FOLLOWS.

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2. THERE WAS NO SECURITY CHECK OF ANY KIND ON BOARDING

AIRCRAFT IN CAIRO. THREE HIJACKERS WERE LAST ONES TO GET ON BUS TO AIRCRAFT. MURRAYS WERE SITTING ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF WAY BACK FROM FRONT ON RIGHT SIDE. CONFIGURATION OF AIRCRAFT WAS ECONOMY CLASS ONLY, SO MR. MURRAY IN AISLE SEAT HAD GOOD VIEW UP TO COCKPIT. TAKE-OFF WAS DELAYED UNTIL ABOUT 0720 AS STEWARDESSES MADE PASSENGER COUNT SIX OR SEVEN TIMES (A NOT UNUSUAL OCCURANCE). AS SOON AS CRUISING ALTITUDE WAS REACHED, WOMAN IN FRONT OF THEM HAD GONE TO REAR OF PLANE BUT RETURNED IMMEDIATELY VERY SHAKEN. ALTHOUGH MURRAY DID NOT UNDERSTAND REASON, HE HEARD STEWARDESS SAY TO HER SHORTLY THEREAFTER THAT IT WAS "TOO LATE AND NOTHING WE CAN DO ABOUT IT," HIS SUPPOSITION BEING THAT SHE HAD SEEN MAN WITH GUN IN BACK OF PLANE. ABOUT FIVE MINUTES LATER, TWO OF HIJACKERS HAD GONE INTO COCKPIT. PLANE HAD CIRCLED FOR SHORT PERIOD AND THEN PROCEEDED TO LUXOR. DURING FLIGHT, LEADER OF HIJACKERS HAD MADE SHORT STATEMENT IN ARABIC IN WHICH MURRAYS RECOGNIZED ONLY SEVERAL REFERENCES TO QADHAFI.

3. AFTER LANDING, MURRAYS' RECOLLECTION OF TIME EVENTS TOOK PLACE IS VERY HAZY. AT ONE POINT, HIJACKERS HAD BEGUN COLLECTING PASSPORTS AND STEWARDESS HAD TOLD MURRAY THAT THEY WERE LOOKING FOR AMERICANS. HOWEVER, THEY NEVER COMPLETED COLLECTION AND MURRAYS WERE NOT IDENTIFIED, NOR APPARENTLY WERE OTHER AMERICANS.

4. MURRAYS IDENTIFIED PICTURES WITH NAMES OF HIJACKERS PUBLISHED IN AHAM AUGUST 24 AS AHMAD MUHAMMAD SULIMAN, AS LEADER, HAD TWO PROMINENT GOLD TEETH, WAS MOST FOREBODING AND WHO HAD OCCASIONAL FITS OF TEMPER, AND MOVED BACK AND FORTH THROUGH PLANE BUT SPENT MOST OF TIME IN FRONT; MUHAMMAD NAGIB AHMAD, WHO STAYED AT ALL TIMES IN THE BACK OF THE PLANE; AND ALI AHMAD OTHMAN, VERY TALL AND THIN, WHO ALSO WANDERED BACK AND FORTH AND PLAYED "JOE COOL" THROUGHOUT, OFFERING WATER AND OTHER SERVICES TO PASSENGERS. THEY SPOKE ONLY ARABIC. (N.B. THIS IS CONSIDERABLE DESCREPANCY WITH IDENTITIES GIVEN BY GENERAL FARID (REF B), BUT IT IS POSSIBLE AHAM GOT WRONG NAMES WITH PICTURES.) STEWARDESSES WERE ALLOWED AT ALL TIMES TO TAKE CARE OF PASSENGERS' NEEDS. PASSENGERS WERE VERY CALM THROUGHOUT AND THERE WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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NEVER ANY HYSTERIA. A FEW WOMEN WERE SICK AND ONE FAINTED DURING ORDEAL ON GROUND.

5. UPON LANDING IN LUXOR ABOUT 0845, HIJACKERS APPEARED RELIEVED AND QUITE RELAXED. THEY KEPT GOING INTO LEATHER BAGS AS IF TO GET SOMETHING BUT GAVE IMPRESSION OF "PLAYING ROLE" THAT THEY THOUGHT HIJACKERS SHOULD. AIR CONDITIONAING HAD REMAINED ON UNTIL ABOUT 1600 WHEN FUEL AUXILIARY POWER

UNIT APPARENTLY RAN OUT. PILOT HAD FIRED UP AIRCRAFT PERHAPS TO DEMONSTRATE THAT SOMETHING WRONG WITH A/C. DESPITE LONG DELAYS OVER REFUELING AND ALLEGED REPAIRS REQUIRED, HIJACKERS HAD NEVER APPEARED JITTERY, BUT SEEMED CONVINCED THAT REPAIRS WERE IN FACT NECESSARY.

6. FIRST OUTSIDER ENTERED AIRCRAFT ABOUT 1600, DRESSED AS "MECHANIC" AND, AS FAR AS MURRAY COULD SEE, WAS NOT SEARCHED BEFORE ALLOWING TO ENTER. NOR HAD HIJACKERS SEARCHED PASSENGERS AT ANY TIME. SHORTLY THERAFTER, HIJACKERS HAD DESIGNATED ARAB PASSENGERS FOR RELEASE INCLUDING THREE EGYPTIAN ARMY OFFICERS IN UNIFORM AND SOME NON-ARAB WOMEN WHO HAD BEEN SICK AND THE THREE OR FOUR CHILDREN ON BOARD. ONLY WEAPON MURRAY SAW WAS HAND GUN IN BELT OF ONE HIJACKER. BETWEEN 1600 AND 1700, SEVERAL OTHER "MECHANICS" AND WHAT THEY THOUGHT WAS EGYPT AIR OFFICIAL FROM LUXOR CAME ON BOARD AND LEFT AGAIN. SANDWICHES WERE ALSO BROUGHT ON AND SERVED.

7. AT APPROXIMATELY 1730, MURRAY SAW ONE OF THREE OR FOUR "MECHANICS", WHO HAD PLACED THEMSELVES NEAR HIJACKERS, HIT LEADER OVER THE HEAD WITH A WRENCH SEVERAL TIMES. FIRING OF ABOUT 15 TO 20 ROUNDS TOOK PLACE AND EVERYONE DUCKED FOR COVER. WITHIN 30 TO 60 SECONDS, ARMED EGYPTIANS WERE ON BOARD TELLING PASSENGERS TO DEPART ONE AT A TIME. JUST AS MURRAY WAS STANDING UP, SOLDIERS YELLED FOR THEM TO GET DOWN AGAIN AND ANOTHER FOUR OR FIVE SHOTS WERE FIRED BUT HE COULD NOT TELL WHERE. MURRAY THEN LEFT PLANE. WHILE THEY DID NOT NOTE HIJACKERS ON WAY OUT, FRONT PART OF CABIN AND REMPA WERE COVERED WITH BLOOD. MAN SITTING ACROSS THE AISLE SAID BULLET HAD PASSED THROUGH TOP OF HIS SEAT AND HE HAD TWO MINOR SHRAPNEL SCRATCHES ON LEG. ON DEPARTURE FROM PLANE, MURRAY WAS SURPRISED TO FIND LARGE NUMBERS OF EGYPTIAN WELL-WISHERS (UP UNTIL THEN AREA AROUND

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PLANE HAD BEEN ALMOST DESERTED) WHO HUGGED AND KISSED ALL PASSENGERS. PHOTOGRAPHERS ALSO PRESENT. ONCE IN TERMINAL, MURRAY ALONG WITH OTHER PASSENGERS NEITHER SAW HIJACKERS AGAIN FOR WERE GIVEN FURTHER INFORMATION.

8. MURRAY SAID HE THOUGHT A MEXICAN NEWSPAPER REPORTER WAS ON BOARD WHO TOOK NOTES THROUGHOUT THE DAY AND WOULD BE ABLE TO PROVIDE ACCURATE ACCOUNT OF EVENTS. MEXICAN EMBASSY CONFIRMS BUT SAYS SHE WILL BE IN LUXOR UNTIL WEEKEND. THEY WILL OBTAIN ACCOUNT AND PASS IT ALONG.

9. COMMENT: MURRAY SAID SEVERAL TIMES THAT HIJACKERS ACTED AS IF THEY WERE "PLAY ACTING" AS THEY HAD PROBABLY SEEN IN THE MOVIES. THEY CONCLUDED FROM THIS, PLUS HIJACKERS' FAILURE TO SEARCH THE PASSENGERS AND "MECHANICS" AND THEIR APPAR-

ENT LACK OF CONCERN OVER OBVIOUS DELAYING TACTICS, THAT
HIJACKERS WERE RANK AMATEURS. HOWEVER, VIOLENCE AND SHOOTING
OF DENOUEMENT SEEMED TO HAVE CONVINCED THEM THAT THEY HAD
INDEED EXPERIENCED THE REAL THING.
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